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EDITORIAL

A Plan for saving

FOR GENERATIONS MAN has recognised the traditional virtues of saving. As the squirrel stores acorns for the long hard winter, so men and women have to put aside for a 'rainy day'. Our generation is concerned as never before with 'saving' in the widest sense. On every side, lip service is paid to saving energy, conserving the earth's resources, rescuing wildlife from the threat of extinction and preserving the environment as man looks to a not-so-distant future when the earth's riches begin to dry up. The benefits of saving appear to need no publicity.

Yet the realities of life tell a very different story. It is the way of our world to live for today - what is the point of mortgaging the present for a shadowy and uncertain future? What have we put aside for our children and our children's children? No great stores of food or energy or materials have been kept for their benefit; the larder is nearly empty for half the world. The only significant stockpile that man has created is the equivalent of one hundred tons of TNT for every man, woman and child on earth.

The instinctive foresight of the squirrel, the most elementary lessons of nature, have not been learnt by mankind. Instead of saving for the future, man needs to be saved from a future of his own making. Unable to save himself, he needs to be rescued from the effects of his greed, from vice and violence, from corruption and decay - and ultimate extinction.

God has a plan for saving - for saving mankind. It has existed from the beginning, a gift to those who will listen. It is outlined in God's word, the Bible. The Bible describes the root cause of all human trouble - and it prescribes the cure. It tells of the last days of this age and the beginning of a new age, when men and women will find a life of peace, happiness and great riches on this earth.

If you would like to know more about God's plan for saving, write now for a free Bible correspondence course to the Correspondence Secretary (address on inside back cover).

Editor



*'And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood. Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of everything that creepeth upon the earth, There went in two and two into Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah.'*¹

¹ Genesis 7.7-9

Men and Women of Faith in Times of Change - Noah -

WE LIVE IN changing times. Progress in technology seems to constantly overtake us, so that with instant world-wide communication we are aware of turmoil, famines, catastrophes and Governmental changes without ceasing. We see pollution, population increases and political strife on the increase. Will there ever be a time of peace and tranquillity?

Although we know from history that there have been dramatic changes in the affairs of men, it is comforting to think that we control our own destiny. Scientists take this false philosophy to extremes and extrapolate present conditions back to the 'Big Bang' or forward to the 'collapse of the Universe'. This is done in spite of the fact that the Bible has specifically stated:

'...there shall come in the last days scoffers,....saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.'¹

The Creation itself, the Flood and the rise and fall of great empires, all demonstrate that God does not leave mankind to work out his own destiny. On the contrary, the Almighty has a great and wondrous plan for His Creation and only the foolish think they can ignore it. It is only human nature that does not change. Humans are generally perverse and *'the heart is....desperately wicked.'*²

No wonder the affairs of men tend towards chaos. But we need not despair, God's plan does include a time of peace and prosperity on the earth. This will be introduced before very long and we can take comfort from the examples of great men and women of faith who also faced times of frightening change. This is the first of a series of articles about times of change.

¹ 2 Peter 3.3,4 ² Jeremiah 17.9

DISTINCT EPOCHS IN GOD'S PLAN

The Bible records that there have been several distinct epochs in the affairs of men. After the fall from grace in Eden there was a long time of increasing chaos as man multiplied on the earth. They were forced by the confusion of languages to spread over the earth as God intended. The period before the flood lasted about 1000 years. The times of the patriarchs, starting with Abraham also lasted 1000 years. From the Exodus with Moses to the times of the Kings was again 1000 years and from the time of King David to the time of Christ was another 1000 years. So we see here a pattern in God's plan. Not only were there 1000 year epochs but each epoch had it's outstanding men of faith. As the second millennium after the birth of Christ draws to it's close we perceive not only a world that needs God's intervention, but a time that needs another man of faith to direct His plan. That man is Jesus Christ.

THE REASON FOR THE DELUGE

There was never quite such a change as that experienced by Noah. The reason for the change is very instructive. As soon as some level of prosperity was achieved, man's innate tendency to depart from God's instructions took over.

We read in Genesis 6:

'...when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.'³

Now that may seem quite reasonable in our present world, but notice the wording. The '*sons of God*' were those who knew about God and His purpose to fill the earth with His glory. The '*daughters of men*' did not.

We see the importance of selecting a bride all through the Bible. When Abraham chose a bride for Isaac, when Isaac wanted a bride for Jacob, when Israel kept separate from the Canaanites and when Ezra made the returned exiles from Babylon separate from their strange wives, we see the same principle applying. God's chosen people are a holy nation and as the bride of Christ is made up of all the faithful saints, so the sons of God must only take brides of faithful women.

At that time God saw :

'...that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually....and the earth was filled with violence.'⁴

Surely one of the major characteristics of the present world is violence. We see it at every level - internationally, locally and individually so we can appreciate how Noah felt. Yet Noah '*found grace in the eyes of the Lord.*'⁵

³ Genesis 6.1,2 ⁴ Genesis 6.5-11 ⁵ Genesis 6.8

What an indication of the control of the Almighty that is! God was aware of one family out of the whole world that gave Him glory through their faith. The parallel with today is no idle fancy. Jesus himself tells us that the latter days would be like the time of Noah:

'...as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.'⁶

We notice from the record that God saved eight people in the ark - that is four pairs who had obviously married in faith as they should have done. The animals went into the ark in pairs continuing the pattern laid down by God in Eden. Finally we see in the above quotation the reference to marrying and being given in marriage, indicating that the sanctity of marriage was in question just as it is today in modern society. Perhaps what was really surprising was that there was still one family left that feared and worshipped God. Jesus continued:

'...also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.'⁷

Again we see a similarity today, with world-wide tolerance of promiscuity and homosexuality as was practised in Sodom. In both cases God appointed a set time and then came a dramatic change. It will be the same when Christ returns.



The Dead Sea, which covers Sodom, the city destroyed by God.

⁶ Luke 17.26,27 ⁷ Luke 17.28-30

FAITH MAINTAINED IN ISOLATION

So, Noah and his family were very isolated in their beliefs. Only eight people were saved through their faith. It must have come as a surprise to them when God told them to build an ark. Not only were they far from the sea, but they had never experienced rain. Even further, the undertaking was a huge one as the ark was about the size of a modern cruise ship and Noah and his sons were a long time in building it. They needed to sustain their faith in God over a long time in the face of much ridicule and hostility by the pleasure seekers around them. No doubt they endured much privation and hardship as well, as all their efforts were directed into this seemingly hopeless task. Noah also proclaimed God's message to his neighbours with no response over the years. We expect they were beset with doubts and worries about how they were going to get the animals into the ark and how they would be able to control them and feed them. But we know, as they knew, that what God says, God is also able to perform. They trusted in God to save them from an evil generation, and God did.

The letter to the Hebrews puts it this way:

'By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.' ⁸

Here we see an important principle established years before the birth of Abraham, who was the '*father of the faithful*' and who's faith was '*accounted to him for righteousness*.' ⁹ Justification by faith was a principle, established from the Creation, because Adam and Eve were cursed because of their lack of faith. The faith exhibited by Noah, however, was so incredible that it certainly marked a turning point in the affairs of men.

A NEW ORDER ESTABLISHED

Here we have a new beginning, a new order and a new covenant with God. The Lord God made a promise that still remains today:

'...and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.' ¹⁰

God further gave Noah the rainbow as a token of this promise or everlasting covenant and He gave all living things into the hands of Noah and his descendants for food and as their responsibility to replenish the earth.

⁸ Hebrews 11.7 ⁹ Galatians 3.6 ¹⁰ Genesis 8.21,22

One would perhaps be forgiven for thinking this all happened a long time ago and is of little relevance to us today. However it is the Apostle Peter who tells us this is much more than a simple historical account. He explains in his first letter that the long suffering nature of God, demonstrated by His waiting for Noah and his family to get into the ark, is an allegory of the salvation in Christ:

‘....In it (the ark) only a few people , eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also - not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.’¹¹

Salvation from death, then, follows the same principle as the saving of Noah. It requires belief in God’s word, baptism into Jesus Christ (our ark) and implicit obedience to God’s commandments even in the face of long term waiting for God to act, just as did Noah.

One final point is worth mentioning, particularly at this turning point in history. God waited patiently for Noah but then at the appointed time Noah was told in no uncertain terms to get into the ark. At that point ‘*The Lord shut him in.*’¹²

As soon as God had shut the door, there was no further opportunity for salvation for the evil people on the earth. In the same way, the following words speak of the future work of Christ:

‘....he (God) hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.’¹³

When that day comes it will be too late to enter the safety of the ‘ark’, for the door of opportunity will be shut.

That will be another **time of great change** on the earth.

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¹¹ 1 Peter 3.20,21 NIV ¹² Genesis 7.16 ¹³ Acts 17.31

HEAVENLY HEALTH

HERE IN ENGLAND the summer is approaching. It is time to get out the old swimsuit and see if we can still get into it. Here we go again - another diet! There seem to be more books written about food, diets, exercise and health than any other subject. We seem to be obsessed with health. The National Health Service is a source of constant controversy. How much should we spend on it? What are the priorities? The United States of America has given up trying to produce a reasonable welfare system. New Zealand has disbanded its health service altogether.

Why should we expect Governments to make us healthy? Perhaps we should read all the books and decide on our own nutrition. What about the additives - do we know what is in our food? What about exercise? Should we ban all alcohol and smoking? How pure is our water? Are alternative therapies like acupuncture of any value? Are we in control?

Perhaps it is reasonable to say everything in moderation is acceptable. As the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: *'use a little wine for...thine often infirmities.'*¹

But what is the inevitable outcome? Everyone has to eventually accept that 'life' is a terminal condition. The final outcome is DEATH.

But do not despair, there is a better way - a way to a better life and to heavenly health. The new approach can be found in the BIBLE and especially in the teaching of Jesus himself. It was at this time of the year that Jesus said:

*'....Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet...Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these...take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink?...But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.'*²

God is in control. He is the author and giver of life. He has instructed us in the BIBLE that man dies because of sin, but that through belief, baptism and obedience, we can have access to a *'newness of life'*³ and *'To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.'*⁴

That is the 'heavenly health' we should all be striving for!

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¹ 1 Tim.5.23 ² Matthew 6.28-33 ³ Romans 6.4 ⁴ 1 Peter 1.4

In the Footsteps of Christ (1)

IN THIS SERIES of articles we propose to outline the life of Jesus following his baptism, paying particular attention to the journeys he made, the places he visited, the people he saw and the works that he performed in each place. It is hoped that by this means, the Gospel accounts will be seen in a new light, and that many of the words and works of Jesus will be seen in their original settings and given their original meanings.

It may seem strange to some that we are starting our biography of Christ during the last three years or so of his life, leaving out the first thirty years. But, as we appreciate, the scriptures are largely silent as far as his early years are concerned. Apart from Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, the travelling down of the family into Egypt, the return to Nazareth and the incident at the temple in Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years of age, we know little of the life of Jesus and his family. We do know that Jesus was subject to his parents, living in their care, displaying a knowledge of the scriptures and of his own mission at a very early age and being known locally as '*the carpenter's son*'.¹ These sketchy details can enable us to piece together in broad outline the circumstances and nature of the child who grew to manhood in comparative obscurity, until he attained the age of about thirty.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

At that time, Jesus' cousin John commenced his ministry, calling for all to repent and to be baptised. No doubt Jesus would have been impressed by the single-mindedness of his kinsman, who lived his life in the wilderness, who was dressed in raiment of camel's hair, a rough tunic, tied around the waist by a belt of leather. His act of stirring up the multitude to come to hear him and then to be baptised would have been heartening to Jesus, who would have known from the scriptures that one would come in the Spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the way of the Lord.

So the first glimpse we get of Jesus is as he travelled to join John the Baptist, who was baptising in the river Jordan. Jesus joined John, who had already been warned by God that the Christ he was preaching about would come and seek him out. On seeing him, John recognised Jesus as his Lord and at first questioned the need to baptise him.

Jesus explained the need for him to fulfil all righteousness and submit to baptism, a Divine requirement, as all Christ's true followers must do.

¹ *Matthew 13.55*

Imagine the scene as John takes Jesus and baptises him. Then the testimony of God to His beloved Son is seen and heard openly, as the Spirit of God descends like a dove, lighting on Jesus and the voice from heaven proclaims Jesus as God's beloved Son in whom He is well pleased.

THE TEMPTATION

Having been baptised and now possessing the Spirit of God, we read in Matthew's record how Jesus was driven into the Judaeian wilderness to be tempted. In the solitude of that wilderness, we can picture him in constant prayer to his Father, and the record tells us he fasted for forty days and forty nights. We know what it is like to be hungry after a few hours without food, but forty days would take their physical toll on Jesus in this state. He would be severely tempted to use this newly given power of God for his own benefit. So Jesus was tempted, for he *'was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.'*²

He knew that the power he now possessed would enable him:

1. To make bread out of the stones, thus proving that he was the Son of God.
2. To presume on the assistance of the angels in keeping him from harm, even if he threw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple at Jerusalem.
3. To take the kingdom promised to him immediately.

In these three points, Jesus was tempted to use the Holy Spirit for his own purposes, rather than for the furtherance of the purpose of God. By using scripture, he was able to reason why these things should not be done. The temptation having been overcome and God's will, not his own having been done, God commanded His angels to minister to him.

THE DISCIPLES CALLED

After the temptation had ended, Jesus decided to visit Galilee, the region where he was brought up and where many of his mighty acts were performed. But before making the journey, Jesus revisited John the Baptist, who instantly recognised Jesus, proclaiming openly: *'Behold the Lamb of God.'*³ Two of John's disciples, Andrew and John, heard this proclamation and approached Jesus asking him where he was staying. *'Come and see'*⁴, Jesus replied, and not only did they see where he lived, but they had the privilege of staying with him for the rest of the day as his guest. A day to be remembered for them, and also for Jesus, who was now not alone, but had the companionship of men who had been looking for the Messiah. This visit set the scene for their future discipleship and the next day Andrew found his brother Simon (Peter), saying to him: *'We have found the Messiah.'*⁵ Jesus greeted Simon and then gave him that prophetic name Cephas, meaning a rock.

² Hebrews 4.15 ³ John 1.29 ⁴ John 1.39 ⁵ John 1.41

The following day, Jesus set out from that region to go north into Galilee after finding and calling Philip. He said *'Follow me'*, an invitation which Jesus gives to all who are called to be his disciples.

JESUS IN GALILEE

It is difficult for us to imagine a greater contrast in the scenery, than there was between Judaea and Galilee. In Galilee, a most pleasant area, Jesus spent the greater part of his ministry, preaching the Gospel, the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. Judaea was mostly bare and forbidding, mountainous, but without spectacular mountain scenery. Apart from some cultivated areas around its towns and villages, it was devoid of trees and vegetation. A land of hot, dry rocks and scrub, stretching from the mountains of Samaria in the north, to the wilderness of Zin in the south and from the western coastal plain to the eastern Jordan valley.

On the other hand, the region of Galilee was a beautiful country of hills and wide valleys, of green fields and crops. The great mountain range of Lebanon to the north brought the area refreshment and life, as the snow-covered summits of the Hermon range melted and brought flowing waters to the sea of Galilee, 700 feet below sea level. Galilee, therefore, was a land of rushing streams, of springs and wells, its valleys were green and fruitful and its plains well watered. This was the area to which Jesus made the journey from the Judaeian wilderness and a greater contrast could not be seen. In the population too there was a marked contrast. The hard working farming people of Galilee cultivated the fields, kept vineyards and olive yards, (both a Biblical symbol of Israel). They grew corn, kept oxen and sheep, cut timber from the wooded hills and fished in the enormous lake.

It was a beautiful land where a man could contemplate the blessings of God, look up at the starry sky and marvel at His creative and sustaining power. It was in this region that Jesus was to manifest the power of God to the Galilaeans of his day.

Having journeyed the 80 miles from Judaea, they arrived in Galilee and went to Cana, a village only a few miles north of Nazareth, Jesus' home town. Cana was the home town of Nathanael. Philip found Nathanael and told him: *'We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'*⁷ Nathanael needed convincing, since Nazareth was not the place from where the Messiah was expected to come, but rather Beth-lehem.⁶ Jesus proved his extraordinary power, telling Nathanael that he saw him under the fig tree, even before Philip called him. Convinced by this revelation, Nathanael exclaimed: *'Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.'*⁹ Both of these titles, here acknowledged by Nathanael, have been lost and find no place among the majority of those who call themselves 'Christians' today. But in one sentence, Jesus' sonship and kingship are proved. So the church of Christ began with this small band of men.

⁶ John 1.43 ⁷ John 1.45 ⁸ Micah 5.2 ⁹ John 1.49

THE FIRST MIRACLE

Whilst staying in Cana, a wedding took place and Jesus and his disciples were invited to the feast. It has been suggested that perhaps a relative of Jesus was being married, because Mary, Jesus' mother was there. There is no mention of Joseph and tradition holds that Joseph, by this time, had died leaving Mary a widow. At the feast, the 'unforgivable' had happened - the wine had run out! This was a disgrace indeed and humiliating to the bridegroom at that time, when a wedding feast could last up to seven days. Some of the guests may have travelled many miles to stay at the feast. Jesus here performed his first miracle, turning water into wine.

Having performed '*This beginning of miracles*'¹⁰, Jesus, his mother, his brethren and his disciples went to Capernaum, rather than going to Nazareth. The map of the start of the work of Jesus is on the facing page. Here, in a busy and thriving place, Jesus stayed for only a few days, performing many works of healing, including the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. We often forget that the disciples had their own families, and that Peter was a married man. Truly they had to leave all to follow Jesus, when the call to discipleship came.

AT THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM

The time now came for Jesus to make himself known to the Jews at Jerusalem. So, leaving his small band of disciples in Galilee to carry on their occupations for a time, Jesus travelled south to Jerusalem to keep the feast of Passover. This was a yearly feast, commemorating the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, when the blood of the slain lamb, sprinkled on the door posts and lintels of the houses of God's people, protected them from the angel of death. The passover pointed forward also to the time when Jesus himself, as the Lamb of God, was to be slain for his people, and his blood shed upon the cross.

So, with this in mind, Jesus journeyed back to the arid Judaeen hills and to the city of God, Jerusalem. Here, about 2000 years before, Abraham had been prepared to offer up his son Isaac, in obedience to God's command, but God had prepared Himself a lamb for sacrifice. Going into the temple, Jesus could plainly see that things were far from well. His Father's house, dedicated as a house of prayer for all people, had become a '*house of merchandise*'.

The changing of money, the selling of sacrificial animals and the hustle and bustle of trading was in full swing. Profit and financial gain, avarice and deceit were desecrating God's house. The noise of hundreds of animals being herded into the temple courts to be sold, added to the pandemonium. This scene evoked a burning indignation in Jesus. He made a whip of some cords and literally drove the animals and their owners out of the temple, flinging over the tables where the money

¹⁰ John 2.11



The ruins of a synagogue at Capernaum. Circa 4th century AD.



The first journey of Jesus, shown by the arrows.

changers made their ill-gotten gains. In this way Jesus first revealed himself to the Jews in Jerusalem, as he will again when he returns to overthrow the systems of men before setting up God's kingdom on earth.

*'Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise'*¹¹, he shouted - and no man opposed him. Finally, a challenge to him came in the form of a question: *'What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?'*¹²

In other words, what authority have you to do this? Jesus gave a profound reply, which was remembered throughout his ministry and which was levelled at him during his own trial: *'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up'*.¹³ Jesus was not referring to the temple in Jerusalem, but to the temple of his body, foretelling his death and resurrection. However, they took his words literally, failing to understand the meaning of the message.

Here we see portrayed the righteous anger of the Son of God. We should remember this side of Jesus' character, which most people ignore. Jesus hated the open dishonouring of God and we shall see that he was not prepared to tolerate it, particularly when it was shown by the Scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of his day.

We shall leave the record here for now. To summarise so far, we have walked in the footsteps of Christ through the words of the Gospel writers.

We have:

1. Been to the Jordan and seen Jesus baptised.
2. Followed him into the wilderness, where he overcame temptation.
3. Seen the calling of some of his disciples.
4. Travelled with him to Galilee at the commencement of his Ministry.
5. Witnessed his first miracle, showing his Divine authority.
6. Gone with him to Jerusalem and seen his zeal for God's house.

Although these events happened nearly 2000 years ago we must not overlook their relevance today. Some of Christ's contemporaries recognised the importance of his mission but many did not and were openly hostile to his teaching as we have seen. But recognising him is not enough. True Christianity is much more than that, as Jesus said to his disciples:

'Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent'.¹⁴

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¹¹ John 2.16 ¹² John 2.18 ¹³ John 2.19 ¹⁴ John 17.3 NIV

Bible Manners and Customs

IN THIS MODERN age of synthetic tapes, the use of sealing wax has probably disappeared altogether. Today, we use those sticky tapes for sealing up our important letters and parcels. They come conveniently enough on a small roll, though at times they are any thing but convenient when they wrap round your fingers and stick to themselves instead of the parcel! 50 years ago, it was common enough to use sealing wax. The parcel would be carefully tied with string and carefully knotted so that it would not slip and become insecure. Then, to make sure that not only was it secure, but that it arrived untampered with, the knots were sealed with sealing wax. Usually a candle was sufficient to melt the stick of wax so that it could be dropped into position. Sealing wax was also used to seal legal documents, and may still be used in some circumstances. It enabled a distinctive seal to be applied. If the seal remained intact, then the document was known to be genuine and that it had not been interfered with.

In Bible times, documents were sealed in just this very way. The method used makes interesting reading and provides us with lessons for today. Take the example we have in the book of Esther. Most of our readers will be familiar with this Old Testament account about the Jews in captivity in Persia and how Queen Esther, herself a Jewess, saved God's people from annihilation. In human terms, it was about a conflict between Haman an officer of the King of Persia and Mordecai the Jew, Esther's uncle. In truth, Haman faced the wrath of the Almighty God, who although punishing His people Israel with captivity, nevertheless looked upon their enemies with anger.

Haman had decided upon genocide and had tricked the King of Persia into supporting his plan. The record in the book of Esther makes horrifying reading:

'Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and **sealed with the king's ring**.

And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey.'¹

¹ *Esther 3.12,13*

The decree that went out from the palace at Shushan, or Susa as it is better known today, had the authority of the King and this could be seen as the visible impress of the King's signet ring in the seal upon the written decree. The seal of the king was sufficient authority to bring about the death of thousands of God's people. The awful fact is that we have seen a similar outcome in The Holocaust of the Second World War. By the decree of the Nazis, 6 million Jews perished - there was no Esther or Mordecai on hand to intervene. The reason for this sad fact is another story, dealt with more fully in the special edition of this magazine, *Light on Israel*. But, to return to our topic, what did these seals look like?

It is here that the science of archaeology has a part to play. The archaeologists have been very busy during the past 150 years, literally digging up the past. From the Bible student's point of view, this has yielded some wonderful finds, all of which support the integrity of the Bible record. Although the work of Israelite craftsmen has not been unearthed in great quantities - virtually no jewellery, perfumes or cosmetics, for example - one object **has** survived in quite large numbers, namely the seal stone. The practice probably goes back to Egyptian or Canaanitish times and Israel were evidently influenced by the use of ring seals. These were precious stones, or sometimes just ordinary stones, on which people carved an inscription. This was pressed into clay or wax (though probably the former) and used to seal either a document or a box. Quite large quantities of these have been found in the Middle East. Not all of these were necessarily Jewish but some clearly are, as the reader will see from the illustrations accompanying this article (page 17). The practice was common among the Arameans, the Phoenicians in Syria and Lebanon, Ammonites, Edomites and those who lived in Transjordan.

In many cases these ring seals or signets are inscribed with Hebrew script. What is interesting is that few Jewish ring seals have any form of image on them - just Hebrew writing. This is in contrast with the seals from other countries which frequently have images on them, some very elaborate. The reason is simple: although the Jews needed ring seals which identified them as the originator of a document or parcel, they were in fact forbidden to make images **of any sort**.

Here is an extract from God's law:

'Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any **graven image**, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.'²

Another clue as to which of the seals found by the archaeologist are Hebrew, lies in the **wording**. The Israelites often incorporated the name of their God into their own name. God was known to his people as *El*, among many other names and titles. *El* means God. So, the name *Ishmael* means **God heard** and the name *Elnathan* means **God gave**. If the reader is a student of the Bible, many other examples will

² *Exodus 20.3,4*



The Jonathan Seal

This paperweight is based upon a facsimile of one of the most unusual Biblical seals which may be seen in the Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem. It is an agate seal, dated to the time of King Jeroboam the Second of Israel, in the days of the Prophets Amos and Hosea (800 - 722 BC). The seal bears the name in Hebrew 'yonathan' hence it is known as the 'Jonathan seal'. The ancient Hebrew letters at the bottom of the seal spell 'YWNTN' but the first two letters, 'YW' are a shortened form of 'YHWH', the Name of God. In our Bibles, it is spelt 'Yahweh'. The last three letters of the seal are 'NTN' and form the verb 'Nathan'. If we put the two words together, we have what is known as the 'theophoric' name which means 'THE LORD HAS GIVEN'.

The engraved griffin, a mythical creature, bears the crown of upper and lower Egypt and so attests to the influence of the Egyptian culture on the region and on the Phoenician artist who in all probability engraved the seal.



A Collection of Seals

come to mind. Many rings dug up from the past bear such names. Of course, incorporating the name of God into one's own name carries with it a great responsibility as well as a privilege! Sadly, so many of God's people forgot that in their very name *Israel*, they carried the name of the Almighty God, *El*. Their behaviour belied the fact that they were and *are* God's special treasure - but, more of this later. There is a lesson here for Christians today, who in saying that they are 'Christian', take to themselves the name of Christ, the Son of God. How many who call themselves Christians *behave* like Christ's followers in teaching and behaviour? Food for thought!

Talking of Christ, the Son of God, we are reminded of his Divine begettal in the words of the angel to Mary:

'And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost (Spirit) shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.'³

The plan of God, declared from the very beginning of His purpose with the earth and man, thus took a great step forward. The great Apostle Paul says of Christ:

'Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:'⁴

The word that Paul uses here for **image** is the Greek word *eikon*. It is the same word that Christ used when, speaking of the image of Caesar on the coin, he asked the onlookers, '*Whose is this **image** and superscription?*'⁵ Clearly, in the same way that the face on the coin was the image of Caesar, so the one who taught the Gospel in Galilee was what he claimed to be - the Son of God. As such, he was the image of God. This concept was such that Christ was able to say to the Apostle Philip:

'....Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?'⁶

What wonderful truths are here revealed in God's word! Christ was not God, but he was a manifestation of the Father, or as Paul put it, when writing to the Hebrews:

'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds: Who being the brightness of his glory, and **the express image** of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;'⁷

³ Luke 1.35 ⁴ Colossians 1.13-15 ⁵ Matthew 22.20 ⁶ John 14.9 ⁷ Hebrews 1.1-3

The word in the Greek text for express *image* is **charackter** and means 'impressed character', as Young's Analytical Concordance makes very clear. Yes, just as those ring or signet seals used in the past made an impression upon the soft clay or wax, so Christ just as surely bore the impression of his Father's character. In these seals, then, perhaps more so than in other excavated objects dug up from the past, we are brought into touch with the skilled workers of Israel, who in pursuing a daily task, have left us with not only their admirable skills, but in their *Biblical* setting, powerful lessons for today.

Now earlier in this article, reference was made to Israel being God's special treasure. This theme is picked up in the last book of the Old Testament, the prophecy of Malachi. We have been looking at the use of the signet seal, which often made use of precious stones, like amethyst, agate or cornelian. Precious stones were used in the breastplate of judgement worn by the high priest, by Aaron and subsequently by his sons. It was a cloth, richly embroidered, and upon which were fixed twelve stones inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Those who serve God faithfully are regarded as His jewels:

'Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up **my jewels**; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.'⁸

The Authorised Version marginal reference shows the real meaning of these jewels as '*special treasure*'.

May it be that we all, who have seen in Jesus Christ the express image of the Father and have not only borne his name but acted upon it, in belief and faith, be among those who will be part of God's 'special treasure'.

David Evans,
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The special issue entitled '*LIGHT on Israel*' which is mentioned in this article, is available free of charge from the John Cordial, Publications Secretary (address on inside of front cover.)

⁸ *Malachi 3.16-18*

COVER PICTURE - JERUSALEM

OUR COVER PICTURE shows the city of Jerusalem, the ancient capital of the nation of Israel, viewed from the Mount of Olives. The earliest record of this city is in the book of Genesis, where it is styled Salem ¹ a name which means 'peaceful' or by implication 'city of peace.' The Apostle Paul referred to this when he wrote concerning Melchizedek that he was '*king of Salem, which is, King of peace.*' ²

Peace is an elusive characteristic as far as that city is concerned today. Both Jews and Palestinian Arabs lay claim to it and until 1967 it was a divided city. Jerusalem has become the symbol of that long and bitter conflict which, even as we write, threatens the stability of the Middle East once more. The Psalmist wrote '*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem*', ³ and the prophets of Israel looked forward to the time when this prayer of the Psalmist will once again become reality. ⁴

The Jews are currently celebrating the 3000th anniversary of the taking of the city by their illustrious ancestor, King David. ⁵ The Vatican, the European Union and others boycotted the opening celebrations which took place last September at the start of the Jewish New Year. It was claimed they were too one-sided, focusing on the city's Jewish history, with little about Christian and Muslim interests. In fact only 17 attended out of the 70 ambassadors which were invited. Mr Rabin in his official opening speech said 'undivided Jerusalem is the heart of the Jewish people and the capital of the State of Israel. Undivided Jerusalem is ours.'

The Scriptures make it clear that Jerusalem will be a burden to the nations at the time just before God intervenes to bring to an end the kingdoms of men and establish the kingdom of God. ⁶ This remarkable prophecy has certainly come true in part. As students of the Bible we believe that the time foretold by the Prophet Zechariah will soon be upon an unprepared world. We are keenly watching events in the Middle East and Israel in particular knowing that Jerusalem's future is assured, for it will be the future capital and seat of God's appointed King, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are reminded of the words of the Angel Gabriel to Mary announcing his birth:

'He (Jesus) shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.'⁷

¹ Genesis 14,18 ² Hebrews 7,2 ³ Psalm 122,6 ⁴ Haggai 2,9; Zechariah 6,12,13; Micah 4,1-3

⁵ 2 Samuel 5,6,7 ⁶ Zechariah 12 ⁷ Luke 1,32,33

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